

*Request*

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SEP 17 1978

25 August 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR : Deputy Director for Operations  
FROM : S.D. Breckinridge  
SUBJECT : HSCA Request for CIA Testimony on Files

1. Gary Cornwell phoned to inquire about two HSCA requests (one of which could be answered immediately, the other of which is near completion). He also said that he thought it would be interesting to have testimony on what can be done with CIA file capabilities, as demonstrated by the research done recently by Chris Hopkins for HSCA.

2. Cornwell presented it as something the HSCA had done that the Warren Commission had not gotten into until the very end of its work. He had some problems explaining just what he wanted, but felt there was a story worth telling, out of which CIA could get some "PR." I asked if I could review the general subject for him for such ideas as it may offer.

3. I pointed out the problem of terminology in discussing files. A folder may be a "file," as may be a couple of safes full of material on a given subject, as may be several file folders on one subject. There was, also, something called by some a "computer file." The point is that there is a lot of generalized terminology about files, usually understood by those working with them but used differently depending on who is talking about what. Added to this is the fact that there are many files around the Agency, as distinguished from a master central file system, used to support different people working on different subjects. In addition, security considerations require some compartmentation. As a result, while a file search for one person is a manageable task, large volume search requests for hundreds of names is very burdensome,

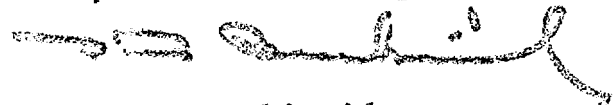
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especially when identifying information is not available. When one gets into Spanish names, with both patronymic and matronymic identities, the problem is only further compounded if the full name is not available. I said I was sure he would recall my frustrated pleas for identifying information, which stemmed from all these considerations. I said that when limited information is available, what surfaces in response to a general request may be a lot of unrelated and unrevealing information, if in fact something emerges at all. So, while we can do such research, the satisfactory nature of it may be somewhat less than desired when some identifying information is not available. While we turn up answers, we also fail to do so in a number of cases. I wasn't sure that this story is very enlightening, and trying to outline it in public would open us to criticism by the press--which has a capacity for misunderstanding and distortion--more than it would gain us favorable comment. I pointed out that intelligence is based on names, to a large extent, which might attract unfavorable comment on persons more concerned with civil liberty concepts than the imperatives of intelligence, and I could foresee news stories on that angle, no matter what we might say. I added, that if such a subject were to be presented--and I would report the request--we would have to select a person to make the presentation; he said that anyone we selected, if we decided to do it, would be up to us.

4. Your reaction to the request would be appreciated.



S.D. Breckinridge

cc: Chief/PCS  
Chief/IMS  
Director/Security  
Mr. Shepanek  
SA/DDCI

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